Introduction: Gothic Riffs: Songs in the Key of Secularization

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When James Joyce mused that history was a nightmare from which he was trying to awake, he was also resuscitating one of Western culture’s primary gothic tropes. Further, he certainly was not saying anything that Coleridge or Keats had not already observed about the gothic hag they represented as Mnemosyne, Moneta, or “Memory,” a figure whose numbness alternates with postures of impotent and aghast shock at what she has been forced to witness. Coleridge’s vision of Memory haunted not only his own consciousness, but, I will argue, European society at large. As the embodiment of a nightmarish past that could only uncannily recur in increasingly horrific manifestations, Memory is the mind that haunts
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itself with its own increasingly hyperbolic and compulsively violent reenactments of the past. This representation of the gothic maternal in agony recalls the death of Valentine’s “bear-mother,” but this mother’s forehead bears a seal that reminds us of the legacy of gothic textuality that presented to its readers the violent images of revolutions and counterrevolutions that were occurring in their midst, of changes that were happening so quickly that their participants were almost speechless to record their painful contortions in a series of gothic narratives. In some ways we can read Coleridge’s Memory as an avatar of what Freud labeled as the uncanny, *das unheimliche* (1919), a representation of the ambivalent attraction to and rejection of the primitive feudal past of Europe, the animistic heritage of “magical thinking” found in Catholicism, or in Coleridge’s case, to his own past as well as the origins of his creativity. Strange and yet familiar, the uncanny is most frequently associated in Freud’s essay with the mechanisms by which that which is most familiar to us—our families, our homes, and our own bodies—suddenly seem strange or possessed by a force that we do not recognize and cannot control.

The gothic secularized the uncanny by making traditional religious beliefs and values both familiar and strange, both immanent and transcendent, both minimal and powerful at the same time. And in many eerie and uncomfortable ways, the master narrative that was being constructed by Coleridge in 1806 was not so very different from the one that forms the basis of our political and religious experiences in the early twenty-first century. On September 11, 2001, American citizens were rudely awakened to the realization that the processes of modernization and secularization, long taken for granted throughout most of America, were in fact still contested in other areas of the world. This event, to have such serious repercussions for so many people across the globe, has caused a number of scholars to produce a series of recent studies that ruminate on how Western society became “modern,” and how that concept can be understood as connected to the convoluted processes of secularization.

Until the publication of David Punter’s *Literature of Terror* in 1980, the gothic novel was routinely read as a reaction against the Enlightenment. Given the very long vogue of rationality during the eighteenth century, the turn to the irrational in literary works was seen as natural and predictable. On much the same grounds, the gothic was understood to be a reaction against secularization: hence its resurgent interest in the supernatural and the return of sectarianism (as witnessed by the genre’s investment in anti-Catholicism). *Gothic Riffs* is the first study to be written in the aftermath of Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (2007), a work that turns our customary understanding of secularization on its head. The usual interpretation of
the secularizing process—dubbed “subtraction stories” by Taylor (22)—is that either religion in “public spaces” diminished during the origins of modernity (called “secularization 1” by Taylor), or that “religious beliefs and practices” declined (called “secularization 2”). Taylor argues that both of these approaches are inadequate because, while there is certainly less religion in modern Europe, this is not a universal feature of the Western experience (the United States being the prime counterexample). Nor is it true to say that the separation of the public and religious spheres is rigorously observed. Taylor argues instead that while the creation of a Western “secular age” is indeed historically unique, its defining feature is not a diminution in religion, but a change in the “background” of the public “imaginary” (13). Using Heidegger and Wittgenstein, Taylor defines “background” as the prephilosophical understanding that conditions thought by being universal, within culture, and invisible to its citizens (13). During the Enlightenment there was a unique change in this “background,” one that asserted for the first time that human beings have the choice as to whether they locate the experience of “fullness” in the quotidian realm of everyday life or in the transcendent and spiritual, or in some other construction that allowed them to simultaneously embrace both worldviews. For Taylor, the final stage of secularization can be understood as a matter of personal choice as to whether one locates supreme value in the supernatural and transcendent, in mundane “human flourishing,” or in a “cosmology” that combines the two (a locus that he calls “secularization 3” [2–4]). As Taylor observes, “[T]here has been a titanic change in our Western civilization. We have changed not just from a condition where most people lived ‘naïvely’ in a construal (part Christian, part related to ‘spirits’ of pagan origin) as simple reality, to one in which almost no one is capable of this, but all see their option as one among many” (12).

For Taylor, this transition in subjectivity occurred when the concern for and emphasis on earthly “human flourishing” replaced the high value that had been placed on accumulating “merit” in an afterlife: “I would like to claim that the coming of modern secularity in my sense has been cotermious with the rise of a society in which for the first time in history a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely available option. I mean by this a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing. Of no previous society was this true” (18). Taylor also argues that, paradoxically, this modern secular mindset was largely fostered in the eighteenth century by religious reforms and enthusiasms—what he calls “Providential Deism”—an argument supported by modern historical opinion, which tends to see schools of French rationalism, for instance, as the exception during an
eightheenth century that was otherwise marked by a revival of religious feelings and beliefs (19). According to Taylor, this change of mindset—this fundamental alteration in the Western “background” (13)—did not happen by accident. On the contrary, it was the product of several newly invented cultural practices and technologies, and I would claim that some of these technologies can be seen in the development of the highly gothi- cized phantasmagoria, the melodrama, the chapbook, and the opera, all of which performed their cultural work by transforming that “background” through iteration and repetition. G. Graham has made a similar observation, noting that “the decline of Religion gives Art its greatest opportu- nity, to become the means by which humanity can enchant its own world” (143). And “enchant,” as he reminds us, derives from the Latin incantare, or “to sing a magic spell over” (116).

But for Taylor, the work of the social imaginary is not a simple matter of “re-enchantment,” as Max Weber has employed the concept. Instead, he argues that the development of “secularity 3” was based on “images, stories, legends” developed initially by an elite and then spread through the wider culture (172) through “new inventions, newly constructed self-understandings and related practices” (22). These cultural practices paradoxically revealed the uncanny doubleness at the heart of secularization 3, or what I will refer to as ambivalent secularization. That is, it was now possible to believe simultaneously in both the realms of the supernatural and the natural, the enchanted and the disenchanted, at the same (uneasy) time. For Taylor, this “repertory of collective actions at the disposal of a given group of society” (173) actually encouraged the development of what he calls a “social imaginary” that advocated a sort of imaginative pluralism that in turn fostered the coexistence of the transcendent and the immanent realms:

The great invention of the West was that of an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained in its own terms, leaving open the question whether this whole order had a deeper significance, and whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it. This notion of the “immanent” involved denying—or at least isolating and problematizing—any form of interpenetration between the things of Nature, on one hand, and “the supernatural” on the other, be this understood in terms of the one transcendent God, or of Gods or spirits, or magic forces, or whatever. (15–16)

Within the “background” of the popular cultural imagination, a variety of attempts were made to resolve the metaphysical split between the mate-
rial and transcendent realms that had occurred during the Enlightenment period. One of its first explanatory challenges was the 1755 earthquake in Lisbon. While Rousseau saw the earthquake as a product of urban development and human hubris, others came forward to suggest purely natural causes as well as the laws that governed the immanent realm (Goldberg, 11–12). The disappearance of God as an explanatory mechanism was, of course, the subject of a good deal of debate but ultimately gave way to the rise of a growing conviction or anxiety that anything in the material world that could not be explained by recourse to either a beneficent God or to natural laws had to have its source in the continuing realms of the demonic and magical. This contentious intellectual “background” actually recalls Tzvetan Todorov’s definitions of the fantastic, the uncanny, and the marvelous:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know . . . there [can] occur an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings—with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently. (25)

And presumably only in the pages of fantastic literature. For Todorov, the “fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. . . . The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (25). Although he distinguishes the fantastic from the uncanny and the marvelous by claiming that they ultimately offer resolutions governed either by natural laws (the uncanny) or the supernatural (the marvelous), Todorov finally sees the uncanny as concerned with events that can be explained only by “the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected, and which thereby provoke in the character and in the reader a reaction similar to that which works of the fantastic have made familiar” (46).

The gothic imaginary arose within this impasse, in the growing confusion that existed between the realms of reason and faith, while the gothic aesthetic can be read on some levels as an epistemological attempt to explain how the immanent world of nature could have displaced the
divine as an explanatory mechanism, but not the demonic. But rather than force people to choose exclusive allegiance to either the immanent order or the transcendent, the rise of ambivalent secularization actually allowed modern Europeans to inhabit an imaginative space in which both the material (science and reason) and the supernatural (God and the devil) coexisted as equally powerful explanatory paradigms. This uneasy coexistence of the immanent and the transcendent can be seen throughout the gothic corpus, particularly in those works in which a ghost speaks to warn and protect the living (the murdered Elvira appearing to her daughter in *The Monk* [1796]) or provides the missing clue to the dramatic mystery on stage or in the text (Evelina’s two appearances to her daughter Angela in *The Castle Spectre* [1797] or the bleeding nun who haunts Lorenzo until she receives a decent burial in *The Monk*). Other examples include the devil who meddles very directly and disastrously in the affairs of the living (*Cazotte’s Le Diable amoureux* [1772]; Lewis’s *The Monk*; or Maturin’s *Bertram; or the Castle of St. Alodbrand* [1816]; and *Melmoth the Wanderer* [1820]). All of these examples, in fact, illustrate the growing Protestant concern as traced by Nathan Johnstone, who has argued that during the English Reformation the concern of Protestants was to “emphasise the Devil’s power of temptation, especially his ability to enter directly into the mind and plant thoughts within it that led people to sin. . . . Subversion was now the Devil’s greatest threat—of the pious aspirations of the individual Christian, and of the godly nation as a whole” (2).

My argument is that the gothic needs to be understood, not as a reaction against the rise of secularism, but as part of the ambivalent secularizing process itself. Providing a satisfactory explanation for the popular gothic’s fixation on formula has always been one of the main challenges facing its critics. By using Taylor, this study is able to account for the highly repetitive quality of the gothic (or what I am calling its “riffs”). The gothic is a site of endless iteration or what Katherine Hayles calls “remediation,” “the cycling of different media through one another” (5), because it is a family of genres in which the cultural work of secularization is particularly intense. Following from Taylor’s argument, this study reads the gothic as a member of a set of cultural practices invented to instantiate the rise of secularism, and therefore, it would be expected that it would be found in both high and low art forms across Europe and the West. If the old critical narrative was something like: where the supernatural once was, the secular now is or where the soul was, the mind now functions, the new story informed by Taylor would claim that the gothic is part of the way modern Western societies generate an ethos of intellectual, imaginative, and spiritual pluralism in an attempt to advance the goal of “human flourishing.”
By way of historical background, it is important to note that by 1780 the “philosophic” movement in France had built an extremely strong case against religion as a species of “superstition” and the prop on which a corrupt political apparatus rested. Proponents of a variety of elite Enlightenment ideologies—scientific experimentation, mechanistic philosophy, materialism, Naturalism—challenged the now largely lower-class animistic conception of the universe that had been constructed on traditional Christian beliefs. In their attempt to establish a new society based on the realities of matter or the organic cycle of birth, growth, and decay, these epistemologies endorsed the scientific principle and the notion that the processes of life and matter occurred without recourse to a belief in spirit or the supernatural. But as various theorists of the decline of magic and superstition have noted, one cannot simply attribute the changes in beliefs that happened at this time to the success of the scientific revolution, the increase in urbanism, or the spread of various Protestant self-help ideologies. As Keith Thomas has concluded, “[I]f magic is to be defined as the employment of ineffective techniques to allay anxiety when effective ones are available, then we must recognize that no society will ever be free from it” (1971, 668). Indeed, as Thomas notes, explanatory supernatural theories were rejected by intellectuals throughout most of England well before effective techniques to explain medical and natural events were developed. In many ways, this conflict is represented in stark visual terms by Goya’s etching *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (1799), in which the uncanny gothic dream world of superstition, magic, and demons continues to exist only when the subject sleeps and his reasonable faculties are dormant (fig. 1). And it is precisely in this historical gap—between the decline of magic and the rise of science—that the gothic imaginary emerges.

Another possible way to approach the secularization thesis would be to ask, how did the West, at least ideally, evolve the values of universal human rights, suffrage, equality between the sexes, companionate marriage, and toleration of religious and cultural differences? One very persuasive explanation has been provided by Jürgen Habermas, who has argued that the development of what he called a textual society produced readers who were unified rather than divided into hierarchical social classes. The development of this broad-based literate public sphere was characterized by a print-based culture and literary texts that extolled the “whiggish”-bourgeois values of individuality, duty, loyalty, equality under the law, a public educational system, companionate marriage, and freedom of choice. The public sphere, according to Habermas, originated as a way of defending the advances that had been made within the private sphere, so that the newer cultural practices instantiated in the Sentimental ethos found their public
expression in literary societies, institutions of learning, and performative spaces such as the theater and opera house. But these social, political, and legal developments did not occur seamlessly or without a fairly contentious interaction with previous modes of largely religiously enforced patterns of behavior and thought, and this is where the vexed topic of secularization enters the discussion. The contemporary French philosopher Jean-Claude Monod has sketched two dominant ways of understanding what secularization is and how it works:

In effect, . . . if secularization signifies the *retreat of religion* as a dominant sphere and the reconstruction of institutions on a rational basis, it accords well with the belief that the present epoch opens a new perspective without precedent, and the belief according to which men are capable, and more and more capable, of “making” history. (Monod, 23; qtd. Percora, 5; emphasis in original)

In this view, secularization is a type of modernity and, in fact, one of the “guiding-concepts,” according to Monod, of modernity. But there is also another way of understanding secularization:

If secularization designates essentially a transfer having consisted of schemes and models elaborated in the field of religion; if religion thus continues to nourish modernity without its knowledge, the theory of secularization constitutes a putting into question of the two fundamental modern beliefs. Modernity would live only as something consisting of a bequest and inheritance, despite the negations and illusions of auto-foundation. Modernity would then not be a new time, founded and conscious of its foundations, but would be only the moment where there is effected a change of plan, a “*worlding*” of Christianity. (Monod, 23; qtd. Pecora, 5; emphasis in original)

And so we are invited to return to Coleridge’s representation of Memory as the “bequest” we have inherited from our predecessors, haunted and self-haunted by many indelible layers of historical residue that never disappear, but only shape and reshape before our startled eyes in increasingly uncanny formations.

It is also possible to suggest that the process of secularization is itself ritualized during this period, and if secularization “worlds” Christianity as Monod argues, it does so ritualistically *against* a previous notion of Christianity. In other words, the cultural work of constructing modernity at once expels certain features of an older practice and it does so in a ritualistic/
religious fashion, as if to borrow from that older practice. But exactly how does a cultural practice like literature ritualistically perform modernity? If modernity is itself produced by a vast cultural system of performances and narratives, is it not at once a religion and a counterreligion? As Hegel observed in a series of Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion that he never published, one way of locating the ethical life of a culture is to examine the “cultic images, rituals, songs and dances, sacrifices, and habits of worship” that they have developed. Those practices “then reciprocally shaped the thoughts and feelings of individuals, making them members of that culture by passing on to them a certain way of conceiving of God, humanity, and world” (qtd. Lilla, 181).

In much the same way I will argue that we can understand the European social imaginary by examining its performative cultural productions, almost ritualistic in the ways they have increasingly served as substitutive public religious practices. Whether performed on stage or presented through chapbooks or ballads, the gothic imaginary in Western Europe told a repetitious and fairly simple tale of familial and blood sacrifice and ritualistic social, political, and religious transformation. That is, in order to modernize, the newly bourgeois citizen of the secular city (the newly evolving nation-state) had to reject the archaic and superstitious beliefs of the past and embrace a brave new world of reason and “natural supernaturalism,” a society in which the increasingly feminized and domesticated middle-class family replaced the hierarchical family proffered earlier by the church and king. The earlier, feudal, aristocratic, and ecclesiastical family/clan (or way of positioning and understanding oneself in a hierarchical cultural structure) was replaced during this period by a new political and familial structure—nationalistic, bourgeois, individualistic, personal, and conjugal—and it was in the oscillation and struggle between these two competing “families”—these two social, religious, political, and cultural formations—that the uncanniness and anxiety in the gothic imaginary was created.

To further clarify, my use of the term “imaginary” is initially indebted to Louis Althusser’s notion that “ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.” For Althusser, ideology does not “reflect” the real world but “represents” the “imaginary relationship of individuals” to the real world; the thing ideology (mis)represents is thus itself already at one remove from the real. In this, Althusser follows the Lacanian understanding of the imaginary order, which is one step removed from the Lacanian Real, or the primal world unprocessed by any psychic rationalizations. In other words, we are always within ideology because of our reliance on language to establish our “reality”; different
ideologies are but different representations of our social and imaginary “reality” and not a representation of the Real itself (109–18). But Charles Taylor has recently adapted the term in ways that are more germane to my discussion here. For him, the “social imaginary” is something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking rather of the ways in which they imagine their social existence, . . . [and this] is carried in images, stories, legends, etc., . . . it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society, . . . [and it] is that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy. (171–72)

It is this social aspect of the gothic that is pursued here, rather than the psychoanalytical notion of the imaginary as the internalized image of the ideal, whole self situated around the notion of coherence rather than fragmentation. For Lacan, the imaginary is understood as the space that develops between the narcissistic ego and its self-created images. Instead, it is possible to look at works as performances that exhibit the relation between texts as cultural products and authors as social actors and producers of ideology, in short, the relation between the “inside” of genre and the “outside” of history.

By using a variety of largely forgotten gothic texts, “gothic collateral,” so to speak, this book examines one aspect of the modernization process that occurred from roughly the outbreak of the French Revolution, through the chaotic period of the Terror and invasion threats in England, to the Napoleonic campaign and its aftermath. This large topic and this particular historical period have been the subject of debate for more than a half century, and I enter the academic fray as something of a revisionist by focusing my attention on the gothic performative imaginary. But I argue here that the processes of modernization and secularization actually evolved and advanced during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by appropriating and adapting the belief systems and subjectivities that were implicit in the conventions of three interlocking and performative modes that were extremely popular at the time: the sentimental, the gothic, and the melodramatic. And as for the concept of “the modern,” I would define it as a temporal category, as a moment of coincidence or immediacy (“classical Latin modo just now” [OED]). For in analyzing the era’s fascination with the “just now,” we inevitably find ourselves confronting the period’s coincident fascination with death, ruins, and apocalyptic imaginings, in short, with the gothic.
This study also has implications for the literature that we now label as “romanticism,” because it seeks to complicate the easy period designations and canonical status of this topic. By seeing the origins of “romanticism” in “gothicism,” rather than the other way around, it is possible to demonstrate that literary culture in this period was not confined to armchair, “closeted” readers (presumably upper-class white male readers) extolling the beauties of the latest lyric offered by Wordsworth. In fact, British literary culture was a raucous, contested terrain fought over in rival theater productions, operas and burlettas, melodramas, popular gothic ballads, chapbooks, and novels, all of which Wordsworth and the other canonical male romantics seem to have enjoyed (despite their vehement protests). I am certainly not the first to assert that the relation between gothic and romantic culture was fraught with ambivalence, class anxiety, and a fair amount of sour grapes. When Wordsworth’s attempt at a gothic drama, *The Borderers*, failed, he simply found it much easier to blame the audience’s jaded tastes than his own lack of dramatic skills.

In fact, one of the premises of this book is that the canonical romantic movement has to be understood as much less original than it has been purported to be. Canonical male romantic poets borrowed from the popular literature and performances of their day, altering them by giving them an elite veneer that distanced their origins in more humble literary productions. I intend here also to advocate for the importance of recognizing the influence of popular, overlooked, marginalized literary productions (“riffs”) on high, elite literary texts. My contention is that Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Byron, and Scott were much less revolutionary or original than they or later literary critics have claimed. A sort of cultural amnesia has occurred, allowing British and American critics to screen out their culture’s debts to plebian, common literary and cultural texts, thereby giving them the illusion that elite literature (in league with reason, Enlightenment, and secular values) has “always already” existed. But the major romantic poets were enormously important in that they mainstreamed some of the most important modern ideals that writers like Thomas Holcroft (see chapter 4) could only glimpse and not yet fully articulate. In advocating for universal human rights, cosmopolitan ideals, literacy, companionate marriage, and the power of the imagination over the privileges of “blood,” the canonical romanticists paved the way for the triumph of the ideology of individualism, interiority, and modern subjectivity as we know it today, but it is more accurate to recognize that these values were initially honed in the flood of gothic works that permeated European culture during this period.

Romanticism as well as gothicism can be understood, then, as distinctly modern, secular literary modes that evolved out of appropriating
earlier and more dramatic genres, like sentimentalism, thereby ensuring their popularity and audience familiarity, but at the same time propagating a newer, modern consciousness that advocated imaginative pluralism or what Taylor calls ambivalent secularization, that is, intellectual openness to a variety of contradictory belief systems. In contemporary modern Western culture it is easy to take for granted a society in which women are not forced into dynastic or polygamist marriages with despotic tyrant-husbands, but such a threat was still actively present within the social imaginary of late eighteenth-century Britain, France, and Germany. This convention or trope became a powerful and persistent figure to be invoked and then ritualistically eradicated in the performances and productions of the gothic. That is, the historically “real” situation was less important than the ritualized, imaginary space that existed in gothic performances, all of which needed the representation of the tyrant-husband in order to reinforce evolving secular values (i.e., the acceptance of companionate versus arranged marriages and the triumph of “human flourishing”). Similarly, gothic “riffs” performed their major cultural work by (sometimes ambivalently) denouncing the privileges of the clergy, the aristocracy, and primogeniture, the legal disenfranchisement of women as heirs, and the fetishization of virginity. By repeatedly telling a few narratives that focused on core secular beliefs, the gothic enacted a wholesale reform of consciousness for the emerging bourgeois European citizen.

II.

There was hardly a soul alive who did not experience more adversity in four or five years than the most famous novelist in all literature could have invented in a hundred. Writers therefore had to look to hell for help in composing their alluring novels, and project what everyone already knew into the realm of fantasy by confining themselves to the history of man in that cruel time.

—Marquis de Sade, “An Essay on Novels”

As Sade goes on to observe in his overview of the novel, the contemporary gothic novel of his time was poised between the tactics of Ann Radcliffe or Matthew Lewis: either a writer could, as Sade observes, “develop the supernatural and risk forfeiting the reader’s credulity,” or “explain nothing and fall into the most ludicrous implausibility.” Clearly, however, in both instances, Sade recognized that the presentation of the supernatural and the power of the transcendent were situated at the crux of the gothic imaginary. And behind the supernatural, Sade notes that the primary question
raised is whether or not the culture should sustain or denounce its religious beliefs and traditions (13–14). Imagine, if you will, that cultural ideologies can be understood as operating much like a symphony does; there is a major melodic line, interspersed with *leitmotivs* and a variety of refrains, repetitions, crescendos, and reversals. In some ways, what I am describing is similar to Bakhtin’s theory of the “heteroglossia” or “multi-voicedness” in textuality. Heteroglossia enters a discourse through “authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, and the speech of characters.” For Bakhtin, genres are performances or specific textual practices within a larger sociohistorical context and they are always responses to social utterances that have already begun. The discourses that emerge out of any genre are by necessity competing and often contradictory because they are responses to a society that is in flux and to a social reality that can always only be partially “real” and “unreal” to anyone at any given moment (1981, 264). Bakhtin has also argued that complex literature emerges during periods of “intense struggle,” when a culture is suddenly deprived of its naïve absence of conflict, when moral systems are recognized as relative rather than unitary: “when boundaries are drawn with new sharpness and simultaneously erased with new ease; it is sometimes impossible to establish precisely where they have been erased or where certain of the warring parties have already crossed over into alien territory” (1981, 418). But discourses are, as Susan Wells has noted, “deeply implicated in relations of desire.” In addition, they are concerned with “objects that have no being outside of the discourse, and are profoundly and unconsciously implicated in the temporality of the text” (145). Fredric Jameson has approached this same issue and stated that history does not “cause” genre in any simple way, but instead “shut[s] down a certain number of formal possibilities available before, and open[s] up determinate ones, which may or may not ever be realized in artistic practice” (148).

As anyone with a passing interest knows, the gothic bears strong affinities with the discourse of the Sentimental as it operated in the mid- to late eighteenth century, and certainly both genres relied on a fairly limited number of historical, mythic, ballad, and even biblical plots (see chapter 1). Very quickly, gothic novels became so popular that they were translated into operas (chapters 1 and 2), dramas (chapter 3), melodramas (chapter 4), ballads (chapter 5), and chapbooks (chapter 6) that circulated beyond the working or independent artisan classes and eventually to the emerging bourgeois reading public who seem by 1800 to have been their primary target audience. It is these cultural afterlives, so to speak, of the mainstream gothic novel that are examined here. In particular, I am interested in interrogating how and why a culture tells and then retells the same narratives
in a variety of different media. Specifically, these works attempt to negotiate and mediate the reform of religious beliefs and rituals, the changing dynamics of companionate marriage, the contours of the new, more egalitarian family structure, the rights and responsibilities of women in a newly evolving capitalistic society, and finally, the implications of a society based on merit and financial status rather than birth (“blood”) privilege. In short, the gothic's ideological agenda is primarily a “whiggish” attempt to expose and then relieve for its readers the anxieties produced in a new world in which neither a king nor a pope (nor their representatives) dominate the subjectivity or agency of the new bourgeois citizen. In many ways, the gothic and its “riffs” are the first truly modern discourses in which individuals stand in a sort of existential alienation in a universe of their own largely imaginary making.

We would, I think, agree that religious wars largely shaped the major political and dynastic events of the Renaissance and early modern periods, and we have a tendency to take for granted that those struggles led to the triumph of individualism, Protestantism, democracy, and the concomitant decline of the church's and the clergy's power and status. This “whiggish” version of history claims that the rise of Enlightenment ideology made possible the growth of capitalism, nationalism, and secularization, all of which privileged individualism and interiority, the private over the public display of spirituality, and the “closeted” reading of the word itself rather than its communal interpretation by a priest. But to transform a society in this way, to move it from an oral to a print-based culture, to uproot traditional ways of doing and living and being could not have been easy or painless. Such an upheaval leaves behind marks, what I could call the scars of modernization, and those wounds are what the gothic sought to trace, preserve, and alleviate to some extent in its own ambivalent manner. Thus in the gothic we have monks who keep coming back from the dead, or nuns who turn out to be our mother, or peasants who are actually princes. History is a rough beast, with little respect for the props—like religion and class and gender—that we have erected to explain why life appears to have a certain shape or character. When history displaces these constructions, there is change, and sometimes this change is of a radical and painful nature. So literature like the gothic arises as something of an alternative theology or therapeutic therapy, what I am calling the “secularization of the uncanny.” This secularized quasi-religion performs its cultural work in a ritualistic manner and provides a variety of attempts to explain, soothe, and eradicate the pain of change by making sense of the wound.10

If the gothic can be understood as a form of secularized theology, then what is its object of worship? It would seem that the modern individual—
middle class, white, male, heterosexual, and capable of displaying an individualistic subjectivity and virtuous feelings and actions—is in fact the new social and cultural divinity. It would appear, in fact, that as paradoxical as it might seem, we are actually talking about the triumph of secular humanism when we are talking about who survives in the gothic textual universe. But exactly how and why did such a construction emerge and how was the gothic involved in spreading the ideal of secular humanism or what Taylor calls “human flourishing”? These are large questions, and in order to answer them it is necessary first to address the subject of subjectivity itself. Human beings can think of themselves only as human subjects, although the definition of what exactly constitutes the “human” has radically changed over the centuries, and for the last three hundred years or so, this definition has included a fair amount of machine as well as animal imagery. By providing a brief overview of the construction of this particular modern and cultural subject, it is possible to suggest some key issues and texts in the development of bourgeois subjectivity in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century culture.

First, as many critics of the period have noted, dazzling displays of personality dominate the canonical literary works of this period. The individual on the stage or on the page of literature, enacting a uniquely personal drama rather than a typological or formulaic one, seems in many ways to represent what we think of the newly emerging self of the gothic/romantic period. Romanticism, however, cannot be generalized about, much as we would like to be able to codify and limit its perimeters. To begin, it seems necessary to cite Friedrich Schlegel, who stated that human beings are characterized by their “terrible unsatisfied desire to soar into infinity, a feverish longing to break through the narrow bonds of individuality” (qtd. Berlin, 15), in other words, he reifies the transcendent tradition. And yet it is also necessary to cite René Chateaubriand, who claimed that his greatest delight was “to speak everlastingly of myself” (qtd. Berlin, 16), a being immersed in the quotidian realm of the senses and bodily desires. We are here at the paradox of the invention of the modern individual. There is on one hand a desire for transcendence and the need to escape individuality, which can be seen in Keats, for instance, who dreams of merging into a nightingale’s song or the figures on an ancient urn, or in Shelley, who seeks obliteration of the solipsistic psyche by union with his epipsyche. But, on the other hand, it is clear that the realm of the immanent was becoming increasingly more seductive. Individual rights, scientific and technological advances, and the battle cry of the revolutionary spirit were sweeping America and Europe, and such reforms demanded nations composed not of amorphous or interchangeable members of classes, but of unique indi-
viduals, all of them bringing their particular talents to an increasingly specialized capitalistic economy. This need to nurture the separate and unique individual was complicated by platonic residue, by the belief that none of us is whole apart from merger with another (the “communitas” depicted in Brueghel’s painting).

We can see in gothics (like other romantic-era texts) an ideological split between what Habermas refers to (somewhat sweepingly) as the transcendent—the “pre-modern,” paternalistic, providential, divine-right approach versus the immanence of “modernity’s utilitarian, rationalistic replacement of the divine and authoritarian with the human and the secular” (1997, 39). In an era that was negotiating rival claims between an oral-based culture and a print-based one, the gothic embodies within itself a discourse system that is fractured between “singing” and “writing”; hence we have a number of operas and dramatic performances that align themselves with a chivalric, faith-based, feudal, and earlier oral-based clan system, while the novels and chapbooks move increasingly to a more modern, secularized, and legally inflected system of signification. Interestingly, the gothic ballad is a genre that attempts to straddle the two traditions, aligning itself at times with an earlier, providential “lifeworld” and the emerging modern and secular state. Habermas has claimed that the “form and content of Romantic art” can be found in what he calls the “absolute inwardness” of the human subject (1987, 18), while at the same time he asserted, not without challenge, that this period invented the “public bourgeois sphere” (1974, 49–55), a space in which the growing middle class could operate in an increasingly professionalized arena and where written discourse and a print culture dominated over oral testimony. The growing divide between the public and private spheres, and the concomitant dispute between dynastic/political and personal/individual concerns, can be seen by examining the evolution of a number of performative gothic texts, that is, gothic works intended to be performed on stage or sung rather than merely read in the “closet” of one’s home. ¹²

Building on the distinction between the “naïve” and the “self-conscious,” Friedrich Schiller’s terms from his essay “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry” (1795), Taylor defines the two types of subjectivity that emerged during this period as the “porous” and the “buffered” selves. The “naïve” or “porous” self is one who is unprotected from the animistic forces of the cosmos, understands time in a nonsecular fashion, and sees an exact correspondence between the self and the cosmos. As such, the porous self lived unprotected from the world of “anima,” demons, spirits, or any of the many cosmic and malevolent forces that could only be staved off through the use of magic, prayer, or luck (38). In contrast, the “buffered” self has
created a “thick emotional boundary” between itself and the cosmos which allows it to oppose animistic forces. The modern “buffered” self understands time in a linear fashion, accepts the world as inert material substance that is subject to reason and human effort, and “takes a distance from, [and] disengages from everything outside the mind” (38). Here Taylor’s sense of the “buffered” self intersects with Habermas’s rise of the bourgeois public sphere, the triumph of a series of practices that create and nurture a historically new sense of the private (Miles 2010).

Using Taylor, it is possible to claim that there were at least two competing subjectivities within the gothic during this period. This first subjectivity was prone to hysteria, cried or prayed at virtually any opportunity, and was either seduced by demons or buffeted about by its own passionate and excessive emotions (in other words, was a continuation of the “porous” self and can be seen, for instance, in the actions of most of the characters in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*). The second emerging subjectivity (largely existing within gothic texts like those written by Ann Radcliffe) was self-possessed under the most threatening circumstances, rational in the face of the most primitive superstitions, pious and habitually Protestant, and literate and committed to an often self-imposed educational program (a “buffered” self attempting to embrace the tenets of Providential Deism). But I do not want to suggest that the chronological transition between these two subjectivities was seamless or moved in a smooth historical trajectory. There was more than a little oscillation in these “selves,” and the gothic at points was the locus of both “buffered” and “porous” selves interacting with each other in the same novel or on the stage at the same (confusing) time. It is actually more accurate to say that the modern individual is, in fact, at once troubled and assured, or in Taylor’s terms, porous and buffered. This individual seems compelled to rehearse endlessly certain rituals in order to dispel or contain the uncanny, and evidently the ritual is necessary precisely because the uncanny constantly recurs. Hence we begin to hear of people who cannot stop reading gothic novels or attending the theater because something like an addiction has seized them.

As Miles (2010) has recently argued, Taylor helps us to read the Enlightenment and romanticism as “different phases in the history of mediation.” For instance, in Miles’s schema romanticism is less a transitional stage and more of a “cusp” that looks both forward and backward at the same time; it is a “bridge” between the earlier transitional period (Providential Deism) and modernity (as fully developed in ambivalent secularization). I would argue that almost identical claims can be made for gothicism, which is very similar to romanticism in its cultural work except that it presents us with a much more problematic and alienated human subject. Whereas the poetry
of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Byron aimed largely for an elite or upper-bourgeois reading audience that was thoroughly invested in the public sphere, individualism, and interiority, the gothic met the needs of those who found themselves continually confronted by forces that they did not understand or could not control. They inhabited an imaginative landscape in which the human oscillated with its opposite, the nonhuman, the undead, the uncanny. Unable to embrace the brave new world of whig-gish optimism, the lower classes found themselves haunted by a kind of undertone of doubt, an awareness that such a faith was unwarranted or at least not yet assured for them.

It is also necessary to recognize that the gothic arises at precisely the time when upper-class white males felt increasingly under siege by middle- and lower-class men, women’s rights, political unrest, and the rapid economic, political, and social transformations of their society. Originally a socially and politically conservative genre, the gothic as a literary mode originated in the mind of Horace Walpole, a man haunted not simply by his own sexual otherness (“effeminacy” was the code word of the day for homosexuality), but more importantly by his illegitimacy (supposedly the youngest son of Sir Robert Walpole, the prime minister, Horace was widely rumored during his own life to be the bastard son of Lord Hervey, one of his mother’s lovers). So what began as a genre ostensibly based in the humanistic myth of the universal and privileged subject (the “buffered self”) actually fissured to focus instead on the dark others who were buried within that partial and inherently false subject (the “porous self”). The gothic, in other words, is haunted by the bifurcation that plagues definitions of the self, as well as contradictory attitudes toward the body, agency, sex, class, and race. All of these avatars of indeterminacy were to appear on the margins of the major gothic texts in increasingly anxious formations. Thus Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) redeems the politically dispossessed hero—after the appearance of the gigantic ghost Alfonso—as the rightful heir by the conclusion of the novel. Displaying what Marshall Brown calls a “half-religious sublime,” Walpole’s novel clearly straddles the “old rhetoric and a new psychology” (44), and his use of the supernatural was crude to say the least. Despite the absurdity of scattered body parts, gigantic helmets, breathing portraits, and statues that have nosebleeds, the popularity of Walpole’s novel revealed a continuing hunger for the supernatural uncanny in the European imaginary, and, although the novel did not immediately spawn the popular outpouring of texts that would occur by 1798, it clearly presaged a new sensibility, or rather, the rebirth of an older one.

Walpole’s novel concludes by reinstating class status and privileging birth and blood, but this ending was not possible by the time Matthew
Lewis was writing his *Monk* (1796) and *The Castle Spectre* (1797). In addition to attempts to invoke something like a Burkean sublime, Lewis's works position doomed monks, devilish women, sexual nuns, and black slaves within its imaginary in order to complicate and challenge the upper-class white male's status and power in society. By the time Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) and James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) were published, full-scale anxiety about a stable, universal-masculine subjectivity and “buffered self” had taken hold. The hysterically split and jeopardized male figure reached his final nineteenth-century British shape(s) in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), all texts suffused with dread toward a masculine body no longer under rational control of the masculine mind.

III.

Hail! Germany most favored, who
Seems a romantic rendezvous;
Thro'out whose large and tumid veins
The unmixt Gothic current reigns!
Much thou hast giv'n of precious hosts
Of monsters, wizards, giants, ghosts:
Yet, give our babes of fancy more
Impart to novelists thy store!
Till classic science dull monastic
Dissolves in flood enthusiastic.

— *The Age. A Poem* (1810), VII, ll. 407–16

Continuing our examination of fiction as the most dominant form of gothic subjectivity, we can also chart extremely similar developments in France by noting the transitions that occurred between the *roman noir* of the late eighteenth century and the *roman frénetique* in the 1820s and 1830s. Charles Nodier (1780–1844) coined the term *frénetique* and defined it himself by stating that it applies to those writers who “flaunt their atheism, rage and despair over tombstones, exhume the dead in order to terrify the living, or who torment the reader’s imagination with such horrifying scenes as to suggest the deranged dreams of madmen” (qtd. Hale 2002, 78). The author of *Jean Shogar*, a Schilleresque tale of a noble outlaw, he also adapted Charles Maturin's gothic drama *Bertram* and Polidori's *The Vampyre* for the French stage (Kessler, xiv).
Beginning with Jacques Cazotte’s *Le Diable amoureux* (1772; one of the major French sources for *The Monk*), French works reveal a clear British and German pedigree, while they also in their turn influenced future gothic writings in both of those countries. The stark ideological bifurcation in French works between *noir* and *frénetique*, however, can perhaps best be demonstrated by contrasting the Marquis de Sade’s gothic tales like “Eugène de Franval” and “Florville and Courval,” both published in his *Crimes of Love* (1800), with the works of Joseph-Marie Loaisel de Tréogate. Sade’s tales are filled with sufferings caused by incest, abduction, and murder in order to show that the random operation of a malignant fate is indifferent to the lives of individuals. In contrast, Tréogate’s *Soirées de mélancolie* (1777) present moral tales that depict all manner of suffering as the way to achieve secular virtue in a world in which the divine is inscrutable if not absent. In neither case are the subjectivities buffered; these are works that continue to present the human subject as an object of events that they cannot control, let alone understand.

The French gothic was in many ways derivative and based on the earlier English graveyard school’s immense popularity and influence. For instance, Jean Joseph Regnault-Warin’s *Le Cimetière de la Madeleine* (1800) and Villemain d’Abancourt’s *Le Cimetière de Mousseaux* (2 vols.; 1801) were both meditations on the senseless violence of the Revolution, the trauma of regicide, the “perversity” of the September massacres, and the consequent bloodshed that occurred as the nation attempted to democratize. Borrowing their structure and ambience from Edward Young’s *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts* (1742, 1745), both works mix politics with domestic and sentimental situations much as did the earlier gothic works of Walpole, Clara Reeve, and Sophia Lee. As Dennis Porter has argued, French literature of this period reflected its society’s “anxiety at the random, individual violence, of murder, rape, seduction, burglary, and street theft” (16–17). One of the most famous examples of this tendency can be seen in Charles Nodier’s “Smarra, or The Demons of the Night” (1821), a concentrically layered tale within three other tales, all of them concerned with violence (infanticide, the guillotine), doubling, and the dream sequence as a “narrative of nightmare” (Kessler, xiv).

Henri de Latouche’s *Fragoletta, ou Naples et Paris en 1799* (1829) illustrates another tendency to be found in French literature of this period, for it is an anti-Catholic political allegory in which the “heroine” turns out to be a hermaphrodite who has masqueraded as a man throughout the novel. Pétrus Borel, who styled himself the “lycanthrope,” also took aim at both the Catholic Church and the Bourbon monarchy, accusing both of hypocrisy and repression. His *Campavert: Contes Immoraux* (1833) contains
his most frequently reprinted short tale of horror, “Andreas Vesalius the Anatomist,” about the famous sixteenth-century Flemish anatomist who dissected bodies in defiance of the Catholic Church’s proscriptions. The tale presents an ambivalent depiction of secularized scientific advances, with the anatomist dissecting his wife’s lovers and eventually her in his basement laboratory in a strange confluence of personal revenge and scientific ideals. On the political side, Borel’s two-volume novel, *Madame Putiphar* (1839), attacks the sexual promiscuity and predatory hypocrisy of the ancien régime, specifically Louis XV and his mistress Madame de Pompadour.¹⁴

In Germany the gothic novelistic tradition was located in what came to be known as the genres of *Ritter-*, *Rauber-*, and *Schauerroman* (knights, robbers, and ghosts; or chivalry, banditry, and terror). Goethe’s *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773; trans. Walter Scott 1799) and Christiane Naubert’s *Hermann von Unna* (1788; trans. English 1794), a novel purporting to expose the workings of “secret tribunals” at the corrupt aristocratic court of the Emperors Wenceslaus and Sigismond in Westphalia (see Murphy; Sweet; Hadley). There is no question that *Hermann* was extremely popular in Britain and has long been recognized as an important influence on Radcliffe’s depiction of the Inquisition in *The Italian* (1797). In addition, James Boaden virtually plagiarized the work as his gothic drama *The Secret Tribunal* (Covent Garden, 1795), while a redaction of the novel appeared as an 1803 chapbook (see Frontispiece). Felicia Hemans later adapted the legend as the basis for her long narrative poem *A Tale of the Secret Tribunal* (comp. early 1820s; pub. 1845), citing Madame de Staël’s *De l’Allemagne* (1813) as her source. In addition to “tribunal” novels, the German ballad was most frequently imported by British gothicists, Lewis himself transposing virtually wholesale a number of German ballads and novels into his own productions (see Conger). Walter Scott, writing in 1833, noted that Lewis was “the person who first attempted to introduce something like the German taste into English fictitious dramatic and poetic composition” (1932; IV:29), while Scott himself not only translated Goethe’s *Götz*, but also drafted a Tribunal play “The House of Aspen,” based on Veit Weber’s *Sagen der Vorzeit* in 1799.

Friedrich von Schiller’s *Der Geisterseher* (1789), translated into English as *The Ghost-Seer; Or, Apparitionist* (1795), was clearly influenced by Cazotte and was itself later the major Germanic source for both *The Monk* and *Melmoth the Wanderer*, as well as a number of German necromancer novels, most famously K. F. Kahlert’s *Der Geisterbanner*, 1790 (*The Necromancer*, trans. Peter Teuthold 1794). *The Ghost-Seer* is a scathing portrait of the real-life Masonic charlatan, Count Cagliostro, a Sicilian who
performed across Europe in the late 1780s as a fortune teller and séance leader and was eventually executed by the Inquisition in 1795. Rumored to be a member of the Illuminati, a revolutionary group of Freemasons who used a number of sensory tricks (magic lanterns, exploding powders) to gain power over their gullible victims, the Freemasons’ aim was to assume control over the property of their bamboozled adherents (usually convents of easily duped nuns). By extension, fear of the Illuminati was based on the belief that they could use these same techniques on powerful “Princes” in order to gain power over nation-states. Schiller’s short mystery was also supposedly modeled on yet another contemporary historical figure, the third son in line to the dukedom of Würtemberg, whose family was Protestant but who was himself rumored to be considering the idea of converting to Catholicism. *The Ghost-Seer* tells the tale of a young German prince driven by a mysterious monk first to religious skepticism, then to libertinism, and finally to murder in the religiously paranoid atmosphere of Venice. Raised in a strict Protestant society, the prince’s naturally good feelings and impulses are corrupted so thoroughly that he easily falls prey to the superstitious mysteries and displays that the mysterious Armenian monk offers to him. *The Ghost-Seer* is almost a textbook study of the “explained supernatural,” except that all of the supernatural powers of the so-called Incomprehensible Armenian monk are finally not explained fully, nor is the work finished. Influenced by the Schwabian pietism of his youth, Schiller focused on depicting God as a punishing force and his *Ghost-Seer* returns repeatedly to exploring the unfortunate connection between freethinking and damnation, skepticism and credulity (see LeTellier).

During the period 1787 through 1798 a series of gothic novels known as *Trivialromane* appeared under the general title of *Sagen der Vorzeit* (“Sagas of Olden Times”), written by Leonard Wächter using the pseudonym “Veit Weber.” A representative title by Wächter is *Woman’s Revenge; or The Tribunal of Blood* (republished in the 1840s in England by William Hazlitt’s *The Romanicist and Novelist’s Library* in weekly installments). Characterized by their use of the rationalistic demonic, these novels set their action in the medieval period and featured occultism, secret societies, demons, and the familiar cast of characters that were also popular in England under the Minerva Press imprint. Christian Spiess, who specialized in writing biographies of suicides (*Biographien der Selbstmörder* [4 vols., Leipzig, 1790] that were some of Thomas De Quincey’s favorite reading material), also penned *Das Petermännchen* (1791), a work very typical of the indigenous German gothic. Folkloric and almost like fairy tales, Spiess’s novels have been identified as part of the *Geisterromane* tradition.
(where the ghosts are real and act in human affairs), as well as the Schicksalstragödie tradition (tragedies of fate), where an ancestral curse dooms an entire family and the only survivor is fated to wander the earth until his ghastly mission is completed, this last trope being a variation on the Wandering Jew theme. Also relevant to the German gothic tradition were writers of the Sturm und Drang (“Storm and Stress”) movement. Committed to celebrating the genius of Shakespeare and Ossian and embracing primeval energy as the source for all creativity, Sturm und Drang authors loosely associated with the movement, like Goethe, Schiller, and Gottfried Bürger (whose works were quickly translated into French and English and influenced Lewis's Monk as well as the ballads of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey), challenged the established power of both the church and state in their works, advocating instead an exaggerated cult of feeling and a personal and individualized ethos that we would recognize as protosecular (see Pascal).

Schauerroman (“shudder novels”) were another German specialty, or what Thomas Carlyle referred to as “bowl and dagger” works in which spectral nuns and outlaws fled across the Black Forest, which itself was filled with walking skeletons. One major practitioner of the genre was Joseph Alois Gleich (1772–1841), who published under the name “Dellarosa,” and who wrote The Torch of Death; or the Cave of the Seven Sleepers and Udo the Man of Steel; or, The Ruins of Drudenstein (see Mulvey-Roberts). The major German gothicist, however, was E. T. A. Hoffmann, whose short fiction “The Sandman” (trans. English 1824; trans. French 1829) was most famously used by Jacques Offenbach as part of the source material for his opera Les Contes d'Hoffmann (Paris, 1881) and was also one of the literary inspirations for Freud's essay on “The Uncanny.” Featuring a series of striking primal scene and castration fantasies, the work ends with Nathaniel committing suicide when he cannot escape a doppelgänger who apparently murdered his father and then created and dismembered his beloved Olympia, a mechanical doll he thought was human. Another of Hoffmann's gothic tales, “The Entail” (1817; trans. English 1824), explores a dark family secret (the usurpation of an estate two generations earlier) and the class warfare that haunts the Castle of Roderick von R——, driving away all its owners. Narrated by a visitor to the castle who spends his evenings reading Schiller's Ghost-Seer and serenading his beloved to the melancholy strains of Ochi, perché piangete (O eyes, why weep you?), the narrator finally unravels the meaning of the mysterious ghost who haunts the castle by uncovering his identity as a servant who murdered the rightful heir two generations earlier. Hoffmann's novel The Devil's Elixirs (1816; trans. English 1824) also exploits the gothic implications of the doppelgänger and the self-ghostened or divided
psyche. Characters are doubled, personalities are split, events repeat, and the supernatural and material realms intersect in uncanny ways throughout this novel (see Cornwell, 113; M. Brown, 127–34). In fact, The Devil's Elixirs was so popular in England that it was redacted into The Devil's Elixir; or, The Shadowless Man, a musical romance in two acts by Fitzball and Rodwell (Covent Garden, 1829), as well as two different gothic short stories, “The Mysterious Bottle of Old Hock” (1825) and “Saint Anthony's Flask; or, The Devil's Wine!” (1830).

As this brief overview of French and German gothic fiction suggests, the genre can be read as one extended historical document, a series of texts that trace some of the traumatic effects of rapid cultural, social, religious, and economic change. As a species of literary ideology, the gothic both reflects those changes—puts them in front of its contemporary readers as well as us for public scrutiny—while at the same time it effects change by accomplishing the cultural work that ideology strives to do. By reading and seeing performed a number of gothic texts, the British public allowed itself to vicariously and bloodlessly experience the French Revolution, for these texts enact a symbolic parricide by presenting the destruction of a corrupt clergy, and establishing a new hegemony presided over by the bourgeois capitalist. Nineteenth-century British subjects never made the move to actually remove their king, although certainly they had cause (as periodic bouts of insanity do tend to impede one's ability to rule a country) and more than a few of them were placed on trial for “imagining” the death of the king (see Barrell, chap. 17). Instead, the majority of British citizens were content to flirt with the idea of revolution, settling for the vicarious and sublimated experience of reading about revolution in place of experiencing it. So the subject who is created in British gothic texts is a surrogate for the reader, a hero or heroine who undergoes what bourgeois Britons did not want to subject themselves to—real action, real blood, real guillotines. The situation was different in France, with a number of gothic works replaying the revolutionary trauma of the guillotined over and over again, while fragmentation and dismemberment, as well as conspiracies by secret societies (read: Illuminati and Jesuits) were the dominant themes in German gothic works (and note that “Germany” as a united nation at this point did not exist; tiny principalities clinging to feudal vestiges of power were still in political operation, at least minimally).

Europeans during the period 1780–1820 were engaged in that most perilous performance, becoming modern and slowly accepting a type of ambivalent secularization that their increasingly rationalistic and capitalistic cultures demanded of them (see Gilmartin). The French chose to clumsily and bloodily perform the work of modernization with a guillotine,
while the Germans resisted unification until the 1848 revolution violently began a process of nationalization that would not be complete until 1871. The British had already killed one king in 1649, and they did not, it seems, want to relive that particular historical nightmare. Revolutionary violence did occur in England during the Gordon Riots of 1780 when attempts were made by the Protestant Association to demand the repeal of the English Catholic Relief Act (sometimes called the Papist Act) of 1778. Close to three hundred protesters were killed and the public was reminded again that it was Protestant religious enthusiasts who had been the cause of the English Civil War and now the Gordon (“No Popery”) riots (Lord George Gordon, the leading Protestant zealot, converted to Orthodox Judaism in 1787). By the late eighteenth century, the fear of French Jacobins, Protestant extremists, Illuminati, and Jesuits combined to create an atmosphere of political and religious paranoia throughout Europe. As Miles notes, “pre-1794 Gothics tended to focus upon Catholic superstition as the enemy of reason and modernity, [while] the German Gothics fixed upon the blind enthusiasm that the Illuminati fostered through their ‘supernatural’ tricks,” but “after 1794 the Gothic became a way of speaking the unspeakable,” that is, revolution. Gothic works, postrevolution, demonize both religious extremists and political “conspiracies,” equating Protestant Dissenters, Jesuits, Illuminati, and Jacobins as identical in their threats to “human flourishing,” political progress, and social stability because of their equally extreme beliefs (2002, 55–56). Whether Britain could survive the processes of secularization and modernization without a bloody revolution was in doubt until April 10, 1848, when the Chartists failed to stage their massive demonstration in London. There would be no political upheaval in England as there had been in virtually every nation-state on the Continent, only more novels about the dire consequences of political upheaval—Brontë’s Shirley (1849) and Gaskell’s Mary Barton (1848)—being two of the most well known.

IV.

We talk of ghosts; neither Lord Byron nor Monk G. Lewis seem to believe in them, and they both agree, in the very face of reason, that none could believe in ghosts without also believing in God. I do not think that all the persons who profess to discredit those visitations really do discredit them, or if they do in the daylight, are not admonished by the approach of loneliness and midnight to think more respectfully of the world of shadows.

If the “outside” of the gothic is concerned with political, social, and economic anxieties, the “inside” of the aesthetic speaks to spiritual, transcendental, and religious transformations. And it is in trying to negotiate the persistently oscillating landscape of politics and religion, history and psychology, that most literary critics of the gothic have found themselves stranded. In addition to ambivalently presenting revolutionary sensibilities, the gothic repeatedly enacts a religious hysteria that can be traced in the continual appearances of demons, ghosts, guilt, confessions, and imprisonments within abbey cells. The “background” of this hysteria can most accurately be located in the uncanny sectarian doubleness at the heart of Christianity itself, that is, in the conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism. The “killing” of Catholicism in England took more than two hundred years, and the gothic charts that eradication in all its convoluted and complicated moves. On this same issue, Allison Shell has observed that

the central paradox in Freud’s essay [on the uncanny] is how the genuinely unknown is not frightening at all, because uncanniness depends on a previous, outgrown familiarity. To many English Protestants of the late eighteenth century, nothing could have seemed more familiar, more superseded or more threatening than medieval Catholicism; and its growing legal toleration would perhaps, at both conscious and subconscious levels, have been almost as terrifying as seeing monks move back into the ruined abbeys. (52)

One of the most persistent tropes in the gothic is the exposure, punishment, and usually death of a corrupt duke or monk, and certainly in this repetitive action we can see ritualized the killing of a bad, illegitimate king (read: the legitimation of a British king) or the erasure of a God of superstition (read: the allegiance and fidelity to a Protestant God). The rationality and self-control that was so highly prized by Protestant individualism and Enlightenment ideology moves to center stage in the gothic, creating a new cultural ideal that chastised idolatry, superstition, hierarchy, and popery in all its forms. But one would hardly characterize the gothic as a uniformly consistent Enlightenment genre. In fact, numerous critics have seen in the gothic a series of nostalgic and ambivalent gestures, conflicted and contradictory poses, a mode of writing composed by authors who mixed piety with equal parts of political and social anxiety (see Baldick and Mighall, 211–21). For example, the Protestant Settlement of 1688, known as the “Glorious Revolution,” allowed Britain to avoid another bloodbath on the order that it had experienced with the beheading of
Charles I. It also institutionalized Anglican Protestantism, complete with the requirement that one needed to pledge the Oath of Supremacy and Allegiance to the monarch as the supreme head of the Church in England in order to obtain a legal, governmental, or military position, and later even to attend university. But by requiring such a public oath, Anglicanism actually contradicted one of its main distinctions from Catholicism (see Sage, xix). Whereas Catholicism was accused of using the confessional to absolve the most heinous of sins, Protestantism insisted on the unmediated internalization of individual conscience (i.e., that no clergyman could absolve anyone of their sins, as this could only be done within the “closet” of one’s own conscience). But how can a society be based on trust in each individual’s conscience if, in fact, our own life experiences inform us all too clearly that evil (in the form of original sin) lurks in every bosom? Whereas the sentimental ethos clung to the notion of the “noble savage” or the inherent perfectibility of the untainted human subject, the gothic was willing to confront the inadequate explanations provided by Protestantism and Providential Deism to basic spiritual concerns: how to understand the persistent mystery of human cruelty, evil, corruption, and finally, death.

The issues of religion, the supernatural, and “God” take on the forms of atavistic mania in a number of gothic works, such as Hogg’s *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* or Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*, both published during the height of pamphleteering for and against the cause of Catholic emancipation in England. Hogg’s *Confessions*, for instance, seems to be predicated on the distinction that David Hume makes between two kinds of superstition: Catholicism, where practitioners prostrate themselves to the authority of priests, and Protestant enthusiasts, who believe themselves saved and set themselves above human laws (76–78). *Confessions* satirizes these Protestant “enthusiasts” who, in their fanatical zeal, believe themselves to be the particular favorites of God and therefore above the law. The antinomian Calvinist doctrine of the sanctity of the internalized conscience allowed its believers to think that they were above both the laws of society and, in fact, even the Ten Commandments. The “saved” characters in this novel fancy themselves as answerable only to their own (rather peculiar) consciences. The novel also presents the devil, Gil-Martin, less as a supernatural being and more as a psychic projection of the hero, Robert Wringhim, or perhaps he is a being who only appears to assume an actual physical form because he is the material manifestation of Wringhim’s religious mania.

Maturin, a Church of Ireland clergyman who was descended from Huguenots, was so invested in the anti-Catholic agenda that he published a tract entitled *Five Sermons on the Errors of the Roman Catholic Church*
(1824), while his Melmoth depicts a man who has sold his soul to the devil and then spends his expanded lifespan of 150 years trying to find someone else who will relieve him of his bargain. Melmoth reveals how clearly the gothic was committed, even if ambivalently, to charting the continuing power of the evils of the old world of Catholicism, communalism, feudalism, and the tenuous rise in its place of the Protestant subject, individual, modern, and secular. An epic work that contains five embedded narratives within the master narrative, Melmoth presents eternity, the soul, the devil, and the riddle of human suffering very literally and, one is tempted to observe, at the same time as components of an almost magical or performative belief system. At one point in the text, Monçada is tortured in a monastery by the temptations proffered by artificial demons and he exclaims, “When art assumes the omnipotence of reality, when we feel we suffer as much from an illusion as from truth, our sufferings lose all dignity and all consolation” (157). Shortly later, however, the narrator explains how that illusion has replaced truth when he notes, “In Catholic countries, . . . religion is the national drama” (165). But the publication date—1820—was late and by the time Honoré de Balzac wrote his satiric and ironic sequel to the novel, Melmoth Réconcilié (1835), the date was even later. France during the 1830s had been racked by anti-Catholic riots and attacks on Catholic churches that recalled those of the earlier Revolutionary period. Balzac’s novel is in fact less a hommage than a bitter retort, suggesting how absurdly impossible it would be for a writer like Maturin, who had spent hundreds of pages depicting the horrors of the Inquisition and of scheming Jesuits attempting to steal a young man’s inheritance, to ever be reconciled to such a monstrously corrupt institution (see Gaillard, Lanone, and Le Yaouanc).

Traces of an almost cartoonish Catholicism—like the public deathbed confession, the belief that the dead can return as spirits (usually carrying blue lights) to demand vengeance or at least a decent burial, the notion that suffering is inevitable and serves a purpose in the cosmic scheme of things, or that the devil can assume the form of a beautiful young woman in order to trick people into losing their everlasting souls—continue to appear in gothic works as what I would identify as the residual uncanny, the persistently strange and yet seductive elements of this earlier system of belief in the transcendent. Once again, religion is the sign of the deviant uncanny in this culture. And when Europeans were not reading about the threats they were facing at home and abroad, they were packing theaters that staged adaptations of gothic novels, complete with ghosts, devils, and all manner of pyrotechnics, smoke and mirrors, designed to convince the populace that revolution and threats to father and fatherland could be confronted.
and then safely contained within the borders of ideology (see Evans; J. Cox).

The secularizing of the uncanny, then, is an ambivalent attempt by a modernizing, Protestant-inflected social imaginary to strip these atavistic practices of their power and, indeed, the magical properties that they still seemed to hold over the public imagination. But the process was bifurcated in its very origins by its ambivalence toward Catholicism, which was both “discredited and hollow,” and at the same time “attractive” (Hogle 2008, 213). The otherness of Catholicism is inherent within the construct that was the Protestant imaginary, and the two systems overlap, intersect, and war with each other within the gothic aesthetic, creating an unstable genre, a confused and oscillating (uncanny) literary landscape. As Freud noted in his 1919 essay,

an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed. Finally, we must not let our predilection for smooth solutions and lucid exposition blind us to the fact that these two classes of uncanny experience are not always sharply distinguishable. When we consider that primitive beliefs are most intimately connected with infantile complexes, and are, in fact, based on them, we shall not be greatly astonished to find that the distinction is often a hazy one.

Analogously, within the gothic imaginary there is a fair amount of slip-page between the primitive and infantile “Catholic” past that the European imaginary would like to repress or “surmount” and the modern, secular tropes of Protestantism that appear as liberatory and rational. In other words, in many of these gothic works there is an attempt to secularize the uncanny, but that attempt is a “hazy one,” for the earlier beliefs hold such power that they frequently eclipse any modern or rational effort to displace or eradicate them. If Foucault (1970) is correct and power defines itself and spreads in culture through discourse systems, then the gothic became a powerful and popular discourse system because it spoke in the voice of the protosecularist, humanist, white bourgeois rational voice that advocated modernism, rationality, and immanence. But it also spoke in a more anxious, conflicted, ambiguous voice, a register that whispered and sometimes shouted that all attempts at rational self-possession were doomed to failure.

Finally, it is not possible to trace a neat progression in the gothic, charting an increasing investment in the immanent and rationalistic
worldview taken by reforms in the political, social, and legal spheres and a concomitant decline in anachronistic, premodern, providential narratives. In fact, later gothic novels continue to present rabidly providential narratives and use antiquated legal and religious codes to prop up their adherence to a chivalric code of conduct. One need only think of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, or *Jane Eyre* (1847). Gothic fictions continued to be split in their presentations of flawed human subjects who attempt to move away from the constraining and antiquated vestiges of the past, as Melmoth does throughout *Melmoth the Wanderer* or as Heathcliff tries to do in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Ironically, there is both a deep nostalgia and a genuine repugnance in gothic works toward the “old order,” the premodern, oral, providential universe, for all its outmoded class privileges and corruptions. Or rather, it seems more accurate to say that the gothic is hopelessly fractured in its presentation of the bourgeois subject, caught between its allegiance to the modern, Protestant, and rational, and its nostalgic attraction to an earlier Catholic and aristocratic lineage that it wanted to maintain for itself. By holding on to a past that it had never historically possessed, the bourgeois subject gave itself a false pedigree that provided it with the sort of “gothic” history (complete with stained glass windows and carved walnut furniture) that it wanted at least imaginatively to continue to possess as yet another performative social imaginary within its repertoire. Odd as it may seem, the bourgeoisie appear to have been strangely reassured by the act of haunting themselves through the gothic. Isolated and vulnerable in their brave new world of modernity, these subjects reached out for something outside the self for authenticity and legitimacy, even if that something was not under their control and frightened them out of their wits. Longing for a tradition they never quite possessed, the middle class appropriated the gothic trappings of their culture with a vengeance (witness Keats’s “Eve of St. Agnes” or Coleridge’s “Christabel”), hoping that the veneer would become a reality, that they would inhabit again a landscape of chivalry with all its attendant fantasies of grandeur.16

In the final analysis, modern subjects would henceforth not locate their subjectivity in religion, politics, economics, or social class. Self-reflective and possessed of a fully autonomous but ambivalent consciousness, the modern subjects who emerged in late nineteenth-century textuality were individuals who acted out of the constraints placed, not on their minds, but on a discourse about the gendered construction of their bodies. Control of the body with its concomitant issues—fertility, wellness, aging, and death—became the new foundation on which modern individuals based their identities. Male subjectivity could no longer be located above and
beyond the body if there was in fact no soul, and there could be no soul if there was no longer a universal belief in a supernatural religion. Men, in other words, became like women; they were feminized in their reduction to the merciless demands of the physical, decaying, corruptible body. Stoker’s Dracula as well as Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray represent the final and late explorations of this British gothic subjectivity.

Clearly, Taylor’s neat schema of porous and buffered selves begins to break down as we contemplate the fates of Dr. Jekyll or Jonathan Harker or Dorian Gray. Doesn’t the notion of a buffered self, in fact, appear to be a phantom construction designed to shield the modern subject from an ominous threat, indeed, the ultimate threat? In throwing up such a construction, and ritualizing the buffered self’s interaction with his environment through various gothic performances, isn’t the modern individual simply displacing his anxieties from one region to another (from the world of anima to the realm of science)? Or perhaps what we see in the late gothics are subjects who are compelled to ritualistically enact the notion that they are threatened in both body and soul at the same time. In a society that could no longer hold out the comforts that accrue from an unquestioning belief in immortality, death becomes the ultimate gothic nightmare, the “Real” that so insults the narcissistic ego that it furiously creates an imaginary and uncanny “other” realm composed of ghosts and presided over by powerful secret societies that provide access to this denial of death. The gothic emerges as a desperate imaginative gesture and ritualized performance, a literary theology that attempts to shield its audiences from a glimpse of the unimaginable abyss into which one descends at death, a state that the subject cannot fully imagine because none of us can imagine ourselves dead, none of us can accept complete and personal nonbeing. To stave off the horror of such a notion, gothic texts, besides presenting their audiences with fantasies of immortality, alternately offered parables about the horrors of eternal life or everlasting youth. The two German vampire operas of 1828, Heinrich Marschner’s Der Vampyr and Peter von Lindpaintner’s Der Vampyr, as well as Stoker’s Dracula present eternal life in a blood-glutted body as a diseased and horrific possibility, while Dorian Gray presents eternal youth and beauty only to curse it as a lie, a sexually deviant perversion. When subjectivity no longer could be positioned in a spiritual, internal, bodiless realm, then the body itself, the external and mortal ontological being, became the final gothic reality for both men and women.

To conclude by gazing on the supposedly immortal bodies of Dorian Gray and Dracula is to recall the interrelated problems of uncanniness and secularity. As I have argued, the process of secularization itself is already
ritualized; it is already a religious practice. That is, the secular has its own inbuilt *telos*, its own origin and end, and that end is the creation of modern individuals successfully repressing their fear of death and inhabiting a desacralized (unhaunted by the past or the future of death) world. I began by claiming that the gothic would appear to be haunted by revenants of the past, but it is perhaps more accurate to say that these hauntings are present simply as part of the gothic’s ritualistic secularizing performances, as presences that must be invoked or invented for the ritual to have efficacy, and then for these older presences to be recognized and then expelled. Perhaps modernity does not privatize religious faith so much as create a new universal “secular” faith in the individual and “this-world” happiness. The ritualized gothic performance is not so much interrupted by the uncanny, but in fact requires its presence in order to be efficacious.

The gothic, then, does respond to real political and social anxieties, as well as to spiritual traditions that present the terror of death in very stark terms to its audience. But this threat is not mystified in the gothic; on the contrary, gothic performances and productions are constructed precisely to weave this threat into the narrative and thus to account for how to withstand it. Thus, gothic is a ritualized performance of the “just now,” while the hyperbole of, say, its language is one convention of its ritual. That is, the anxiety about death (or what we could call ritualized anxiety) is real, but the gothic ritual can operate only by using a set of tropes that eventually becomes an elaborate and highly repetitive discourse, a religion that operates through the invocation of anxiety. Analogously, David Collings has observed that “secular history can found itself neither by pretending to displace the sacred, nor by bracketing it, nor by differentiating sacred and secular authority, for in each case the secular remains vulnerable to an uncanny return of what the sacred once codified” (2007). It is precisely gothic’s attempts to ritualize, contain, commodify, reify, or displace the sacred that this book will examine. While there may be no ultimate “outside” to literature’s presentation of history, there is in these works a gothic interiority that continues to be haunted by its need to both claim and reject the symbol of the sacred and the past. There is, it would appear, finally, only Memory.